"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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The Earth is the Lord's

By C. E. Raven*

Mr. Chairman, My Friends. When I received this invitation the thing that fascinated me most was that on this very program of yours the final note should have been the words which the Chairman has just quoted, "The Earth is the Lord's" because,as I have been studying for the Gifford Lectures that I have just finished delivering on this whole question of the relatedness of God to the universe, of nature to revelation, the thing that has stood out more and more clearly is, first of all, the extraordinary opportunity that confronts us in the present situation. For, as we all know, the three basic human relationships, the problem of race, the problem of the social order, the problem of the sexes, "neither Greek nor Jew, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female", are being restated; and for the first time in my lifetime, for the first time for at least one hundred years, the whole intellectual outlook as between the rival claims of science and of religion is quite plainly becoming clear and a more favorable climate is arising.

In such a situation, it is a magnificent thing that you, having faced the tremendous problems of the world's population, the world's food supply, the world's resources in agriculture, and the provision of nutriment for mankind, should fix upon these particular words as the last note of your conference. For, surely, it is precisely in the recovery of that belief that the earth is the Lord's, that our

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first task as people of faith confronts us. Our trouble is precisely that we have for so long lost that sense that however much the heathen rage together, whatever men vainly imagine, yet the earth is the Lord's. That superb conviction, which runs right through the great succession of the Hebrew seers and prophets and poets and which finds its fulfilment in the writings of the New Testament, is precisely the great affirmation of faith which seems so lacking in the present day.

The earth is not man's, nor the devil's: neither the humanist nor the materialist is right, if our biblical faith in God can be vindicated. I need not remind you how continually this is affirmed through both the great sources of our Christian faith, through the great Hebraic tradition, which fully recognizes man's guilt and failure and yet maintains the supremacy of God, and equally in the great Greek tradition fused with the Hebraic for three hundred years before the coming of Christ, which affirms that the universe is intelligible, that behind it is the divine reason, and that,as Plato put it, God perpetually expresses Himself through natural law and is always the Geometer.

Those two great sources of our Christendom testify to this basic belief that in and through the natural order, in and through the universe, and its future, the quality of the eternal, not only the majesty, but the wisdom of God is made manifest.

What I want to ask, first of all, is why we have lost that faith ? Why is it that possessing this inheritance we have so signally failed to convince our own contemporaries or to make plain to the world the reality of our failure ? I think the reason for that is we have never been adequa tely Christianized. I hope that startles you, it is meant to. I do not think that we have ever thoroughly Christianized our concept of God. What do I mean by that ? What I mean is this. St. Paul expressed it in, I think, his greatest theological achievement, when he came to Corinth humiliated by his failure to present God in terms of power at Thessalonica or in terms of wisdom at Athens, and resolved that he would no longer, as he says, huckster it, he would be content to know one thing, and one thing only, Christ and Him crucified. So, writing to the Corinthians, His supreme miracle was accomplished. He could say, "The Jews seek after miracles, they are beset with an idea of God as a God of power, a Sultan, a miracle worker. The Greeks are crazy for wisdom, they think of God in terms of the supreme Philosopher, the supreme Mathematician, the supreme Engineer. But we are not satisfied with a picture of God in terms either of power or wisdom. We see God in terms of a man on a cross, of the love that suffers, and suffering, redeems. We see God, not in terms of a Sultan, nor an Engineer, neither of Judge nor of Designer. We see God in terms of our Father."

I say with all humility that I do not think the Church has ever quite completed the work which St. Paul then began, the work which led him to say in his last word to the Corinthians that the gracious gift of the Lord Christ guaranteed for us the love of God and enabled the community of the Holy Spirit, that the revolution accomplished in Christ not only transformed man's concept of the very nature of reality, but initiated for man a new relationship with his own species, a new type of solidarity in the world.

Why I have ventured to put this before you this evening, my friends, is that quite plainly, the main struggle against the bewilderment of our times arises out of the estrangement between the great scientific movement and our Christian religious tradition. No one who was at Cambridge in my day at the beginning of the century, certainly, no one who did the crazy thing I did and undertood to study Christian theology and also genetics in the same post-graduate year, finding himself in the position of a circus-rider trying to ride two horses and ignoring the fact that they were going at top speed in different directions, no one who went through that experience would doubt that at Cambridge in that day, it was very nearly impossible for an honest and intelligent youngster to be a scientist and a believer. That is not an exaggeration. The scientific concept of the universe in the year 1904 insisted that man, by the exercise of a purely quantitative technique in the categories of physics and chemistry and the procedure of the laboratory, could arrive at a complete and objective and accurate picture of the universe itself; that given a few more years of non-interference from those superstitious believers, it would be possible to complete an analysis of the whole physical universe; and that having analysed it, it would then be possible not only to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire, but to reshape it nearer to the heart's desire. We as scientists were sent out into the world believing that on the analogyof a great machine we could not only interpret the physical universe but look forward very speedily to being able to interpret life and our own human species, since we, like Descartes' animals, were mere automata, robots, interpretable in terms of physics and chemistry of our structure.

In such a universe it was perfectly obvious that there was no room for God, no room for freedom, no room for any real creativity of any kind. Man boasts his ability to measure up and master the universe, but man himself is only a cog, rather an unimportant cog, on an unimportant flywheel, in the great machine of that universe.

I need not attempt to trace the stages by which the scientific movement which in the seventeenth century was pioneered by great Christian men, some of the greatest Christian men of history.

I suppose, now out of that great century and its clearly religious adventure, there came the dominance, first of the machine, and then of an industrial civilization, and then of this belief that in terms of analysis, in terms of its origin, in the physical-chemical realm, all the aspirations and ideals, all the beliefs and experiences of mankind, could be interpreted and explained away.

I am not going to go through history. It transformed our civilization from agricultural to industrial, it transformed the whole population of the world, it gave enormous advantages, it broke down the barriers of space, and changed wht whole character and meaning of time, it has produced this tremendous unifying of the world, and incidentally, atomic energy which may yet destroy us, but it did so at the cost of making it almost impossible to find room for God. The fact is, of course, that the Church, ignoring its Founder's teaching, fell away to miracles and the abnormal from the normal and the ordinary, ignoring the fact that Jesus took all His primary messages from the simplest things in the world, men sowing fields and catching fish, women sweeping houses and baking bread. Christians, ignoring His warning that God was to be found in every aspect of its creation, concentrated more and more upon fitting God into the gaps, more and more satisfying themselves with the lawyer's definition of the acts of God as things which cannot be otherwise explained. As science was very rapidly closing up the gaps, the position was an extremely unfortunate one to have taken up.

But that was not the basis of the trouble. The real basis of the trouble, my friends, is this persistent refusal to get rid of the idea that God is primarily the Sultan, and the Engineer. You cannot explain this universe on those terms, at least I believe you cannot. And that is the thing I want to throw down at you, as hard as I can, as a challenge.

In the early days of the scientific movement this dilemma was propounded very faithfully and exactly by a predecessor of mine at Christ's College, Cambridge. It is a curious thing that you can trace the whole rise and fall of a bad theology in terms of that particular college. This is a point which has never been made before in its praise, but I commend it to you.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century, 1670 or thereabouts, old Ralph Cudworth, who wrote, "The Intellectual System of the Universe," declared that, with regard to the problem of evil, it would appear that there were only four possibilities, granted the Deity, and granted the fact of evil. Either God was not able, though He might be willing, to overcome evil; or else He was able

but not willing to overcome evil; or perhaps He was neither able nor willing. There remained the fourth possibility, that He was both able and willing. "Only this," said Cudworth, "would seem to be worthy of God, and it does not happen."

How are you going to get away from that? There are, of course, two ways by which people have striven to get away from it. One is by dethroning God and enthroning the Devil, which is very frequent. A very large amount of neo-orthodox theology does, in fact, banish God politely but firmly from his own universe, and say that the Devil is in control, that the world is hopelessly and incurably corrupt, and that though God may stand outside the frontier, may, so to speak, hear and then insinuate Himself and infiltrate the situation, and save a few, yet there is no hope for this world as it is. That, of course, is just politely but firmly bowing God out of His own universe; and anyone who is accustomed to think in terms of a universe measured by light years, will think it is a little premature to give way to despair of that kind. Still more ridiculous,of course, is the notion that man is responsible for this tremendous upset, though I know that man is capable of magnifying his own office to a pretty considerable degree. Really, the idea that creatures like you and I can solemnly claim to have upset the whole divine course and intention of the world, does not that strike you as an inverted Pharisaism of a positively dangerous kind?

Well, there it is. I do not think you can answer that dilemma as long as you think of God in terms of the Sultan, in terms of the one whose primary condition is omnipot nce in the full sense of the word. Whether that means that the chaplain ought not to begin our prayers with "Almighty" I leave for him to decide, but it is a question which I think is not irreverent or irrelevant. I happen to prefer to begin with "Our Father", because I think I have surer warrant and am on safer ground.

The second alternative, of course, the second trouble, is that when the Deists had been gradually defeated over the attempts to represent God as a sort of absentee landlord in the Universe, a Sultan, yes, but a Sultan a very long way off, who had not very much to say beyond the original construction of things, then there came the time in which the Greek view came forward, and it was as Mathematician and Engineer and Designer of the universe that we were taught to think of the Deity. And there, of course, the arch-offender was another member of my College, old Archdeacon Paley who presented a wonderful argument from design, but did so in the pre-Christian and sub-Christian imagery of the watchmaker and the watch, an imagery which as you all know, goes back to Cicero, and probably to Xenophon, classical writers, and may be much older than that, but which is quite inadequate to account for the hamartemata, as Aristotle called them, the errors, the sidetracking, the blind alleys, the groping and struggling of life which any study of evolution or any knowledge of human character must reveal. If it is a watch, it is a very grit-spangled watch. I mean it does not go very accurately. Both those concepts, you see, really leave the problems

of suffering and sin unanswerable, and that is my ground for saying that we have not really thought through the extent to which the revelation in Christ, the belief that the true picture of God is a Man on a Cross, transforms one's whole concept, not only of God, so to speak, if you can separate God from the universe, - but of God and the universe.

As soon as we begin to acknowledge that the most sacred thing in human life, parenthood, is the least inadequate analogy by which to describe the creation, we begin to find that these things, suffering and sin, become, if not explicable, at any rate, to some degree, at least, appreciable. We can understand that the world is the scene of gradual birth and education of creatures who some day will respond to the full life of God's family. We can dare to think of the whole process from atom to saint as one process, so that the universe itself is not merely the theatre on the stage of which the drama of "Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained" is played out, but that the theatre is part of the play, and that the whole process manifests the unchanging energy of the divine love. Then, I think we begin to see that if at the end of it there is to be a voluntary community of fully developed individuals, then, the earth must be so fashioned that out of it can be gradually produced creatures who are free and therefore, free to crufiсy, creatures who are sensitive, and therefore, suffering, creatures who will one day enter into that relationship, that abiding relationship with the divine,of which Jesus is the unique example, but which is shadowed forth in bits and pieces in the lives of His saints.

It seems to me, at any rate, clear that if we are prepared to say the creation is in a sense all of a piece and all of God, that the same design is manifested in it, that the design, Ladies and Gentlemen, is a cross-shape design, and that out of it does emerge the Resurrection and the Communion of Saints, then I think we have got a message to give the world. Now, when I ventured to put this out, much less provocatively, but at greater length, in the form of the Gifford Lectures, I did not expect to receive a certificate of orthodoxy from the Christian newspaper,which, during my life, has always called me an arch-heretic: but so, it happened. What I have put to you is a condensed variation of the doctrine declared by a very competent and learned reviewer in the "Church Times", to be wholly consonant with orthodoxy. If that be true, I still think it is an orthodoxy we have seldom appreciated, because I still say the chief cause of difficulty in our approach to the scientists has been precisely our maintenance of concepts of God which to them do not seem to be reconcilable with the evidence of evolution or history, and which leave no room for the pain and sin of the world.

Now is that point of view consonant with the religion of the New Testament? There, I want simply to confine myself to three or four illustrations, and the first thing to which I woulddraw your attention is the shortest of all the parables of Jesus, the little parable beginning at the 26th verse, 4th chapter of St. Mark, which we quite wrongly call"the seed growing secretly." You will remember, Jesus said, "Unto what shall I liken the Kingdom. It is like unto the seed thrown into the earth; man throws seed into the ground,and then he sleeps or wakes, the seed grows", he does not know how, "The earth bears fruit of itself," by its very nature the earth bears fruit. Whatever we do, waking or sleeping, the earth is so constituted that it bears fruit.

I do not suppose there is any doubt that that is the correct meaning in that particular parable. It is not the secret growth of the seed; it is not the parable of the wheat and the tares; it is an authentic independent parable whose purpose is to maintain that in the last resort God has so ordered His world that His design of growth finds fulfilment in it. That, as I say, you have worked out in what I still think is the more applicable account of the creation that we have in the Holy Scripture.

I wish that we would concentrate upon the great section of the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans in which St. Paul brings to its climax his whole exposition of what old-fashioned folks called evolution. You remember how after speaking about our Father, and working out the salvation of the individual soul, as it finds itself in the family of God, he then asks a question, Yes, but does this record of salvation, does it perhaps illuminate the wider question, the whole nature and character of the world in which we live as well as disclosing what heppens to the individual in Christ? Can we from that record, from that experience, develop a theology, develop an interpretation, an answer to the riddle of the universe? He then lays down four distinct propositions. The first is the astonishing, but for us so natural and appropriate declaration that the process of creation is incomplete. It is not an act done once and for all, as the first chapter of Genesis has led so many people to suppose, God resting when it was all over, and since that time only correcting our faults and keeping us in tune. This first statement is liable to be misunderstood, on account of the translation of the crucial word in the authorized version, "vanity", which for most of us has a quite different meaning. As soon as you think of vanity as meaning frustration, you get the fact that what St.Paul means is that the very earth has not yet reached its completeness: it is condemned to a certain futility. Yes,he lays that down himself, no doubt, because he immediately says, "This, of course, is God's own act." St. Paul is far too good a theist to believe that it is either the Devil or Eve which upset the divine plan; God, Himself, made the earth subject to frustration.

Then, secondly, this frustration is ,so to speak, pregnant. It is not an end. It is, perhaps, some way from its beginning, even if some way also from its completion. The agony, the frustration,is the travail of the new birth; and the end is not yet. Creation groans, in labour, waiting for the event which will complete it, waiting for its consummation, the manifestation of the children of God. Out of frustration, birth; those two are eminently vivid descriptions of the evolutionary process with all its ghoulish horror and endurance, and its perpetual emergence of something new, even when things seem desperate.

Those two propositions are supplemented by two others. You see, there are those who say, "Yes,it is just a sort of drama." But is it, God looking on at the agony of His creation, and at the end, saying, presumably, "Well done," or perhaps, "Not so good, do it again?" Is God's relation to the universe that of the dramatist watching the performance of his play? "No," said St. Paul, "on the

contrary, in this agony, God, Himself, is involved." He is not detached and remote. He is not the Sultan sending down messengers at intervals into an otherwise abandoned world. Nor is He the watchmaker at intervals taking out the cogwheel and testing it and repairing it. God is not a remote spectator. So we need not feel that we are alone. We need not take the sort of agnostic attitude towards God, and, therefore, feel towards Him as so many people taking that view have felt, a certain irritation, almost a certain contempt for one who sits above the water-floods in unending calm.

God, Himself, through His spirit, is involved in this creative process, and collaborating, "making intercession" which means, I suppose, coming in alongside of us. Therefore, the fourth proposition becomes perfectly obvious because, if God is involved, the end is sure, and the suffering is worth while. So, St. Paul can say not only God makes all things work together for good, making everything cooperate for good for them that love Him; but can say even here and now, neither height nor depth, nor things present nor to come, neither life nor death can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus,our Lord. You see, Ladies and Gentlemen, I feel that passage has taken up the words that our Lord said in St. Mark iv.26, that the earth is so constituted that growth takes place. That gives us a picture of the way in which growth takes place which is not incompatible with a modern doctrine of the evolutionary process. I think it fits.

Then, I need not remind you of two other quite different authors in the New Testament who seem to me to say the same thing. Think of the great threefold definition of life in St. John. Read the texts which I should like to see written up over every place of worship and every council chamber and school and college and market place of the world. "He came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly."We are coming to see that the whole evolutionary process was travestied by Thomas Henry Huxley, when he described it as proven that the universe, the world, was a gladiatorial show, that all this business of the survival of the fittest means the survival of the most live, and should be interpreted, it can be quite as truthfull interpreted in terms of the free translation of St.John Chapter XII, 25, "that they might have life," and then, secondly, "Who so loveth his life loseth it, who so hateth his life, - rides loose to his life - in this world, the same keeps it unto life the eternal",. which has been called the sublime law of sacrifice, the principle, the Cross principle, which runs right through the whole evolutionary process from the beginning to the end, and finally, this is life, this is life eternal, this is life in the heavenlies. This is the life that does not change. "That they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, our Saviour." And finally, you can get the still more obviously Greek writing in the New Testament, the talks to the Hebrews, letter or sermon, whichever it was, in which you get the superb opening, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manner, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets," the continuity of the revelation , and then the novelty of the revelation, "hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."